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LENT ENTERPRISE, AND CHURCH POLITY.

Search the Scriptures—John v. 29.  
Speaking the Truth in love—Eph. iv. 15.

REV. MILTON BIRD, EDITOR.

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THE  
THEOLOGICAL MEDIUM.

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IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

I. All creatures are mutable. God alone is immutable. They are all subject to change. He alone remaineth the same forever and ever. The sun has his spots, and so has the moon. The pale queen of night is sometimes in the increase, sometimes in the wane, sometimes eclipsed by the interposition of the earth between her and the sun. The bright prince of day does not always shine with noonday light. He has his diurnal and annual motion; rises and sets, and puts on a different face; and is sometimes eclipsed, and veiled with clouds and vapor. He is not always in our hemisphere, but is always going from tropic to tropic, whereby he makes various shadows upon the earth, and produces the different seasons of the year. The heavens are subject to change; sometimes they are clear and serene, at other times the electric cloud, the flashing lightning and the roaring thunder, fill the minds of spectators with awe and consternation. This earth, too, is subject to changes. Upon its surface nothing is stationary. Now it is covered with frost and snow, and then it is decked with all the beauties of spring. Volumes of water have covered it, and the time is approaching when it shall be wrapped in sheets of fire and melt with fervent heat. Its appearance is changed by the action of the elements and by internal convulsions; even the rocks decay, and are sometimes violently removed from their places. Vegetable and animal forms appear and perish. Nations rise and fall. Once splendid

cities exist only in name; scarce a vestige of the ruins in which they are buried, remain to tell the passer by where they proudly stood. The mightiest works of intellect, and the most splendid monuments of mechanic and artistic skill, are destroyed by the wasting tooth of time. Mutability is inscribed on the face of the heavens and the earth, in characters known and read of all men. The most beautiful flower that blooms, soon loses its loveliness and sweet odors. The tree grows and fades. Animals appear and perish. Man rises from his cradle to be laid in his coffin. Genius sometimes expires like a candle burnt down to the socket. The opening bud of promise, even in blooming, expires. The man whose locks are whitened with the frost of many winters, experiences a second time, the mental and corporal debility of childhood. Life is made up of light and shade; the tears of joy give place to tears of sorrow. He that rolls in the grandeur of wealth to-day, may to-morrow be in penury and want. He that topples on fame's tallest pinnacle one hour, the next may be sinking in the deepest infamy. More moveable than a feather, man is tossed between passion and passion, daily changing his plan and changing the means; sometimes cheerful, sometimes sad, his body changing from health to sickness. Though at the head of creation's scale, he cannot assure himself of a consistency and fixidity in any thing, the brief space of a day; no, not of a minute. The inhabitants of the celestial world are subject to changes. Some of the angels kept not their first state; they have fallen from high thrones in heaven to the dark prison house of the universe, where they are reserved in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day. All the inhabitants of the earth are liable to changes. Even man, in his best state, was not unliable to change; for though he was created innocent, yet he was mutable; although he was holy yet he continued not in holiness, but fell and became sinful and miserable, and now he is subject to almost countless changes. One hour he appears full of life and vigor, the next he is a palid and lifeless corpse.

Now he is the most lovely of all creatures; but, alas! how soon is he a mass of corruption. To-day he is actively engaged in the pursuits of this life; to-morrow he is an inhabitant of eternity. But God—being a simple, unmixed, infinite, immutable, eternal, and uncreated Spirit—cannot change, for in him there is neither variability nor shadow of turning. What he always has been he is now, and what he is now he always will be.

II. We prove the immutability of God, by the subjoined reasoning:

1. There is a necessity for some immutable principle, or being. As the dove, which Noah let out of the ark, could find no resting place for the sole of its foot before the waters abated, so an intelligent spirit can find rest in nothing but that which is immutably perfect, for otherwise it would be subject to the same mutations and agitations which the being it depends upon is subject to. If all things in the universe did not exist and act by some immutable power, no order would be observed in their existence and action; no existence and action could be regularly continued. For the house to stand erect, it must have a stable foundation. While its branches are shaken with the wind the root of the tree lies firmly in the earth, else it would not stand. The principle of vitality is necessary to the existence of life in vegetable and animal organization. In the science of mathematics, both in its higher and lower branches, the unit is necessary; no operation can be performed without it. It is the first principle of numbers; it cannot be changed from itself, but it changes all numbers. Add to it any number, it is the beginning of that number but the unit is not increased by it; a new number arises from the addition, but the unit still remains the same and adds value to other figures, but receives none from them. The world could not exist without the law of gravitation; it would be dashed into wild confusion, jarring and destructive collision. But a law of gravity cannot exist unless there be a centre of gravitation: there can be no centre of gravitation unless there be some immutable principle,

or being. But there is a law of gravitation; there is order and regularity in the world; therefore God is immutable.

2. This may be proved from the Bible. It is sufficient to adduce a few passages. *Exo.* iii. 14. "I am that I am," signifies immutability as well as his eternity. "I am," signifies his eternity; "that," or the same, "that I am," his immutability. "I am JEHOVAH; I change not."—*Mal.* iii. 6. He changes not, because he is Jehovah. The sun has its shadows and variations, but with the Eternal Father of light "there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."—*James* i. 17. Though the heavens and the earth, the most beautiful pillars of creation, shall perish. Yea, all of them wax old as doth a garment; and as we change an old habit and garment to receive a new one, so they shall be wrought into a more beautiful fashion, answerable to the design of God in the formation of a new world wherein righteousness shall dwell, by melting down and refining with the last fire, the old world wherein wickedness did reside, rather than suffer it to lie under an irrecoverable ruin: yet God shall endure; he is the same, and his years shall have no end.—*Ps.* cii. 26, 27. God is immutable; all creatures are perishing and changeable; they are in continual fluctuation under his feet, while he remains fixed and immutable; the same God, the same in existence and nature, the same in will and purpose, in the righteousness of his ways, the truth of his word, the holiness of his proceedings, and the rectitude of his nature.—*Deut.* xxxii. 4. The Scriptures not only ascribe immutability to God, but exclude every thing else from partaking in that perfection. He "only hath immortality," or unchangeable duration.—*1 Tim.* vi. 16. His name JEHOVAH, signifies his unchangeableness; it never has any thing added to it, nor any thing taken from it.

3. The immutability of God may be proved from his self-existence. Being self-existent he exists by necessity of nature, and by the same necessity exists as he is, and cannot be otherwise. He must invincibly remain

the same in his existence and the mode of it, because he doth not only exist but doth always exist the same; the same now as he formerly was, the same hereafter as he now is. Self-existence has no relation to time; as it does not result from, so it is not changed by circumstances. He that can truly say "*I am*," that is, I receive from no other what I am in myself, depends upon no other in his existence, and therefore hath no changing power either over or in himself, and must be immutable in existence and in all essential properties.

This argument has been stated as follows: "The existence of God is independent of all will and power whatsoever, from which absolute and most perfect independence follows his perfect immutability and incorruptibility; for there is no will or power, either in himself or in any other being, which can alter his existence, seeing it is not subject to any will or power, it being certain that as he was not produced by another, so he was not himself the cause of his existence." "No will or power, therefore, can possibly produce any alteration in his existence either by adding or taking away, or in any respect making it other than what it is. Where there is no cause, there cannot be an effect: but of an alteration or change in God, there is no possible cause; and therefore this effect, namely, a change in his existence, is impossible; and to say that this is possible, would be as absurd as to assert that he might be the cause of himself, or might arise out of nothing. There is no cause of a change; and *nothing* is as incapable of producing one effect as another, and can no more annihilate or alter existence, than produce it."

4. The immutability of God may be proved from his eternity. We cannot contemplate this attribute without the apprehension of Divine immutability, since it implies existence that always was and always will be the same. All change is finished in time; one mutation preceding, another following; but that which is before time, cannot be changed in nor by time: God was eternally what he was, consequently is not mutable. If he could

in the least cease to be what he was, he might also cease wholly to be as well as cease to be entirely and uniformly what he was. The notion of mutability is against the eternity of God. If he is not truly and universally eternal, no reason can be rendered why he may not be subject to decay and dissolution; but he hath a true and proper eternity, which implies his unchangeableness.

5. The immutability of God may be argued from his superlative perfection. His supreme perfection is an invincible bar to any change in him. In his existence and perfections he is ever the same. There is no principle of decay in his nature. Absolute perfection necessarily enters into our conception of the Divine Nature: it admits of no addition or subtraction. If we suppose God to change in any respect whatever, his infinite excellence is nulled or impaired by it; because, in all changes there is something from which, and there is something to which the change is made, a loss of what the thing had or an acquisition of what it had not, it must follow that if God change to a greater perfection, then he was not infinitely perfect before, and consequently not God; or if to a less perfection, then he will not be absolutely perfect, consequently no longer God after the change. If there is changeableness in God, either the change must be voluntary or necessary—from himself or from another. If voluntary, he then intends the change for the better, and chose it to acquire a higher perfection by it; the mind is drawn out to any thing, under the notion of something good and desirable in the object of its choice. Since what he esteems good is the object of the creature's desire and choice, evil cannot be the object of the Creator's desire and will. But if we suppose him to be changed for the worse when he did really intend the better, it would argue a defect of wisdom and a mistake of that for good which was evil and imperfect in itself; or if it be for the better, it must change for something without himself—not possessed by himself, but by some other. Then the end of the change must be the acquisition of some excellency without and above him; for every being



acts for some end, and that end is either within itself or without itself; if the end for which God changes be without himself, then there is something superior to him: besides, if he were voluntarily changed for the better, why did he not change before? If for want of power, then it would speak the imperfection of this attribute; if for the want of knowledge of what was the greatest good, then it would speak the imperfection of his wisdom—he was ignorant of his own happiness; if he had wisdom to know it and power to effect it, it must be for the want of will; then it follows that he has not that love to himself and his own glory, which is essential to God. Voluntarily he could not be changed for the worse, for he would not be regardless of, and opposed to his own glory. Necessarily he could not be changed; because, as we have already seen, that necessity could neither arise from himself nor from another. All the excellence possessed by creatures, was received from his hand. The sin of the creature, which is not from him, cannot touch his nature nor obscure his glory. “If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou unto him, or what receives he at thy hand?”—*Job xxxv. 6, 7.* Clouds and vapor cannot diminish the light of the sun, nor is it impaired by shooting arrows against it; no more can the sins of man subtract from God. Man’s services are no addition to him, any more than the brilliant gas lamps of the illuminated city, or a million of candles lighted on earth add to the sun’s light.

Unchangeableness is a Divine attribute; it arises out of the infinite perfection of God’s nature itself, and is therefore *essential* to it. We esteem mutability in man, either an imperfection or a fault; his natural changes, as to his person, are from weakness and vanity; his moral changes, as his principles, inclinations, and purposes, are from imperfection, ignorance, or inconstancy, and therefore this quality is no way compatible with the superlative glory and attributes of Jehovah. He cannot change

in any sense which implies imperfection; immutability is, therefore, essential to his Godhead.

6. The immutability of God is evident from his spirituality. He is a Spirit, without any mixture of parts that can induce a change. Every thing mutable is a composition, either essential or accidental; as, for example, if a tree be made leafless it loses its green foliage, but the tree itself remains, and nothing of its substance is lost; this we call an accidental change; but if the wood be burnt, there is no annihilation of the tree but a revolution of it into those parts entering into its composition. The substantial part of the wood is lost, the earthy part is changed into ashes, the airy part ascends in smoke, and the watery part is changed into air by the fire: this we denominate a substantial change. God is not subject to either the one or the other. He is not a made-up Divinity, a man-deity, consisting of opposing parts, some inferior others superior; one part that is changed and another that changes it; parts mutable and parts immutable; parts dependent upon others which are independent; consequently some things, in himself, are God, others not. Such a compound cannot be the God of the Bible any more than the beast in Daniel's vision, his head of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. In God there are no variety of parts, one dependent upon another, nor upon any thing which is not God. He is the most simple being, and since he is the first in nature there is nothing beyond him; therefore he cannot, by any means, be thought to be either compounded or dependent. Being infinitely simple, he has nothing in himself which is not himself, and therefore cannot will any change in himself; he being his own nature and existence no change can come, either from an internal or an external principle. Mutability is positively inconsistent with the simplicity and spirituality of the Divine Nature.

7. The immutability of God may be proved from his omnipotence. He that is almighty cannot be made

worse; for to be made worse is, in part, to be corrupted. If he be made better, he was not almighty before; there was a lack of power in him. There cannot be any change, unless it proceed from himself or from another. If from himself, it would argue an inability to preserve himself in the perfection of his nature. If from another, that other must be superior in strength, knowledge, and power, else he could not change him, either in his nature, knowledge, will, or in any respect whatever. If from either an inability in God to continue the same, or an inability in him to resist the power of another, he would not be omnipotent. If he be omnipotent, he must of necessity be unchangeable; since nothing, either from within or from without, could work any change in his nature. Being omnipotent he is as independent of, as he is uncontrollable by any other being; therefore the omnipotence of God is conclusive proof of his unchangeableness.

8. The immutability of God is evident from the permanent order exhibited in the works of creation and providence. There is a most obvious distinction between the faultless, changeless laws of nature, and the gradual advancement and rectification of human speculations concerning them. Progress in the inductive sciences, in the inventions of art, in great discoveries, has not been the result of any advance in natural laws, but an improvement in the education of man. Nature has maintained her own calm and truthful and changeless quality, without freaks or falsities or deflections; and man, her pupil, has gradually opened his eyes and discovered the regularities which characterize the general system of nature. The progress of science, in strictness of speech, simply means the rectification of human opinions concerning the objects to which science relates, and not such changes in these objects themselves as imply on their part, defect and falsity and mutation.

The planetary system, for example, is now the same complete system, in all its laws and attractions and motions, as when the morning stars first sang together—

as when its Maker said of it, "It is very good." The same sun, in the same relative position, with the same attractions, shone on the first pair in Eden as shines to-day on us. The same stars which look so thoughtfully on us, shone on the tents of the Idumean Emirs, when Job and Eliphaz and Zophar discoursed concerning Orion and the sweet influences of Pleiades. The whole star-bespangled arch, the shining heavens, proclaim their Maker's praise, as when first built by his hand. The planet on which we dwell, is making its diurnal and annual revolutions in the same trackless path in which it performed its first revolution. Those central orbs, from which the first ray, traveling at the rate of 8,000,000 of miles a minute, has not yet reached our earth in the many thousands of years that have past, are now shining with the same undiminished brightness as when that ray was sent forth.

The polar star never wanders, and never changes; the law of magnetic attraction is invariable: hence the mariner's compass is an accurate and useful instrument, to point out his way across the pathless ocean. The succession of the seasons is regular. The face of the whole earth revives under the breath of spring; the seed in the earth vegetates, and the grain springs and grows to maturity: therefore the farmer plows and sows, in the confident expectation that he will have large and useful crops.

The structure of the human system, was after the same model at the first as now. The heart, the brain, the nerves, the viscera, the irritable fibre, each and all performed the same functions in the days of Hippocrates and Galen, as of Harvey and Stahl and Haller; and, at the time being, as in the days of the latter.

The progress of intellectual science, can but mean a more accurate analysis of mental processes, the laws of mind being the same in all times.

If there has been progress in moral philosophy it has been owing, not to the production of new principles and facts, but the rectification of human opinions concerning

things which have remained the same from the beginning. God's moral government gives proof of his immutability. The moral law, under which we are now placed, is the same as that which was prescribed to the first man and the first angel. The elements of vice and virtue are the same alike dissimilar everywhere, and at all times; miseries of the same kind inevitably follow the one, tranquillity and bliss are the sure reward of the other. Even the stormy sea is not without its fixed law through all its chafing waves, swelling tides, and rushing currents. This ample world, therefore, with its immense variety, displays not only the all-comprehending and pervading power of God, but as it remains from age to age subject to the same laws, and fulfilling the same designs, it is a visible demonstration of the existence of God and his immutability.

9. If we contemplate his omniscience, we can discover no reason for any change in him; for he being almighty, and possessed of infinite rectitude, and as omniscient—knowing all things—there can be no reason why he should change. He is necessarily immutable.

III. *In what respect he is immutable.*

1. In regard to place. "He fills heaven and earth."—*Jer. xxiii. 24.* No place can be imagined where he is not. The "heaven of heavens cannot contain him."—*1 Kings viii. 27.* "He is higher than heaven, deeper than hell."—*Job xi. 8.* He is infinite leagues beyond created limits, and exists substantially in illimitable space. As his centre is everywhere, so his circumference is nowhere. He is omnipotent, therefore cannot be changed in place. He is indivisible, and therefore as really present in every place as he is at any point. Allow a million of worlds are about our planet encircling one another, within their created limits Jehovah is not contained. When the most inventive, active, and towering imagination, has run over them all, then let it imagine one world after another till it can fancy no more, still God is there, and he exists infinite leagues beyond this point the same as he does in our world. His dwelling-place is limitless. He who has

no cause of being, can have no limits of being. Though not in created things till they were created, yet their existence produces no change of place in the Creator. In regard to place, he is as unchangeable as his eternity. There is nothing contradictory of this doctrine in the following and like passages of Scripture, rightly understood. When it is said, "Behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity."—*Isa.* xxvi. 21. "For behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth."—*Micah.* i. 3. "And the Lord came down."—*Gen.* xi. 5. "And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there."—*Ex.* xxxiv. 5. It is not by any locomotion or change of place, but a change of outward action when he puts forth his justice in new judgments, and wicked men feel the hot coals of his anger scorching them. When God is said to draw near to us when we draw near to him—*James* iv. 8—he comes not to us by any change of place himself, but draws us to him by a change of mind, will, and affections in us; by spiritual influence, exciting and supporting grace. His drawing near to us, is rather his drawing us to himself than his coming to us; as when boatmen pull a rope, one end of which is fastened to the shore and the other to the boat, the shore is immoveable, yet to the eye it seems to come to them, but they really move to the shore. It is a common expression, "The sun is come into the house," when it yet remains in its place and order in the heavens; nothing more is intended than that his beams pierce the windows and enlighten the room. Thus when God is said to come down or descend, to draw near or depart, the language simply means the exercise of his agency in ways of fresh mercy or new judgments, in the warm beams of his love or the burning flames of his wrath.

2. God is unchangeable in his existence.

The tendency to decay and final dissolution in all creatures has no influence upon him, his existence is independent of it. The terms young and old are inapplica-

ble to him. "One day is with" him "as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."—2 *Pet.* iii. 8. The existence of creatures is successive, and may be compared to a stream in perpetual motion, of which one part is past and another is to come. But the existence of God is totally different, as we endeavored to show in proving his self-existence and eternity. At no point of absolute duration, may it be said to him, "thou art not." He never began to be, and he will never cease to be; and in this view his immutability coincides with his self-existence and eternity, which have been already proved.

That which exists in itself can not be changed, because it hath nothing before it, nothing more excellent than itself; but that which is from another as its first cause and highest good, may be changed by that which was its efficient cause and chief end. There can not be a state of change in God's existence; it cannot be less perfect, nor can it be more perfect: finite and infinite are extremes so distant, that they can never pass into one another; it is impossible for that which is finite to become infinite, or that which is infinite to become finite. Necessary existence, and therefore immutability of being, belongs by nature only to God. It is of the same necessity with the rectitude of his nature; God can no more be changeable in his existence than he can be unrighteous in his actions.

### 3. God is unchangeable in his perfections.

We have just proved the immutability of his existence; his existence and his perfections are the same, and therefore, what belongs necessarily to the existence of God, belongs also to every perfection of his nature; not a single attribute can receive any addition or subtraction. Immutability is a thread which runs through all the divine perfections. His power changes not, his goodness, his holiness and his truth, endure forever. Mercy and justice have their distinct objects, and distinct acts; mercy is conversant about the penitent, justice about the obstinate sinner. In our idea and conception of them, the perfections of God are different: his wisdom is not his pow-



er, nor his power his holiness, but the whole centre and unite in immutability, which renders them highly excellent without the least shadow of imperfection. How shaded his blessedness would be, if it were changeable! How dim his wisdom, if it might be obscured! How impotent his power, if it could be sickly and languish! Mercy would lose much of its lustre, if it could change into wrath; and justice much of its terror, if it could be turned into mercy: while the object of justice continues unfit for mercy, it has need of mercy, but remains only fit for divine wrath. But immutability is a glory belonging to all the attributes of God.

His goodness changes not. His holiness and justice admit of neither addition, nor subtraction. His omnipotence can be neither increased nor diminished. In every attribute he is immutable.

4. In knowledge he is unchangeable. The divine knowledge comprehends all knowable truths at once. An eternal knowledge comprehends in itself all time, and beholds past and present in the same manner, and, therefore, his knowledge is immutable: by one simple knowledge he considers the infinite spaces of past and future. His knowledge is as unchangeable as his existence. As there is no succession in his nature, so there is none in his knowledge. God knows all things by an intuitive act of his understanding: consequently, he knows things that are successive, before their existence and succession. Though there is a change and variation in the things known, yet his knowledge of them and their several changes in nature, is invariable and unalterable. He knows succession in things, and he knows a thing to be past which before was future. As from eternity he saw Adam existing in such a time, in the first time he saw that he would be, in the following time he saw that he had been. But this he knew from eternity. He knew it in the same manner, though there was a variation in Adam, yet there was no change in God's knowledge of him in all his states. Though Adam was not present to himself, yet in all his states he was present to God's



omniscience. Mutability is as far removed from the knowledge as it is from the nature of God, for his understanding is not distinct from his nature. It is difficult to conceive how God's foreknowledge should be absolute, as it is difficult to conceive how his present knowledge penetrates the heart of man and knows his present thoughts; but one may not argue from the incomprehensibility of the mode, to the impossibility of the thing.

In knowledge there is the mind which knows, and the objects known. These objects may be mutable without involving mutability in the knowledge. We must not overlook the distinction between the knowledge of things *possible* and the knowledge of things *actual*. The actual being of things adds nothing to the knowledge of the infinite mind. A distinction is to be made between the knowledge of God as to things possibly and things actually existing; also between his knowledge of all possible things, and of those things to which he determined before their creation to give actual existence. To deny that in the mind of God any distinction existed between the apprehension of things which would remain possible only, and things which in their time would come into actual being, would not merely make his knowledge mutable, it would be a round denial of the perfect knowledge of the divine understanding.

God does not have something for the object of his understanding now, which he had not before; he never will have anything as the object of his understanding which he has not now; he never had anything as the object of his understanding which he has not now. "His understanding is infinite."—*Ps.* cxlvii. 5. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."—*Isaiah* lv. 8, 9.—Nothing can be hid from the vast compass of his understanding, no more than it can shelter itself without the verge of his power. We see one thing with eyes and another with mind, but God sees and knows only with

mind, and his mind is himself, and is as unchangeable as his existence, therefore his knowledge is unchangeable. As he knows things now so he always knew them, and never will know them otherwise.

Immutable knowledge does not invade the freedom of the will in man and other moral beings. There is a common argument to the contrary; it is briefly this, if God foreknows all things, and is infallible in his knowledge, whatever he foreknows must take place, is therefore necessary, and no longer dependent on the freedom of man.

But this kind of reasoning is fallacious; for man does not perform one action or another because it was foreknown by God; but God foreknew the action, because man, in the exercise of his free will, would perform it. Our knowledge of the future bears some analogy with this, since it is always founded on a knowledge of the past and the present. But on account of the imperfection and limitation of our understanding, the future is to us only *probable*, and our knowledge of it only *conjectural*; while to God the future is *certain*, and his knowledge in respect to it infallible; and therefore immutable.

5. God is immutable in his will. We ascribe to God will as well as intelligence, or choosing as well as thinking. By the term will, we denote his sovereignty, or rather the freedom of his will. By this word, moreover, we designate the thing itself which God reveals as his will, or which he commands by his precepts. The objects of the divine will are those of the divine knowledge. God, like all rational beings, chooses only such things as are perceived by his understanding to be good. His will, therefore, as well as that of others, depends ever upon his knowledge. And he chooses or rejects as the objects which are presented to his mind appear in his judgment desirable or otherwise. Then, since his knowledge is infallibly perfect, his will is immutably the best.

The immutability of God is not a result of blind and physical necessity; but of infinite, essential moral excellence and his determinations and actions are the result of liberty and choice.

The immutability of the will of God lies in that of his nature. Since his will is always founded upon his perfect knowledge, and his judgment is infallible in regard to whatever it may relate, he cannot be supposed to fluctuate in his will. The mutability of man's will is owing to the uncertainty and defectiveness of his knowledge. But there can be no error in the divine mind; and hence no change in the divine will. The Bible often speaks of the immutability of the divine will. "Jehovah bringeth the counsel of the heathen to naught; but his counsel standeth forever."—*Psalms xxxiii. 10, 11.*

6. God is unchangeable in his purposes, his promises, and threatnings, the principles of his government, and the end of its administration.

If we contemplate his omniscience, we can discover no cause for any change in his purposes; for as omniscient he knows all things; therefore, has no reason to act contrary to his first resolves. The same is true of his promises and threatenings, the principles of his government and the end of its administration. They change not, since there can be no cause for change.

[CONCLUDED IN OUR NEXT.]

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## "THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED."

The fashionable literature of the day is unquestionably producing a ruinous effect on public morals in city, town, village, and country place. Any one capable of the least observation, can readily discern this fact. Bad as is the effect of the tippling system, the use of alcoholic drinks as a beverage, the tendency of popular literature is even worse. The latter leads to and continues the former. We are pleased to see some of the conductors of the secular press directing attention to the dangerous evil. As an example, we refer to the "*Buffalo Commercial*,"

which gives a true explanation of the mystery. In speaking of the recent elopements, abductions, etc. in various parts of the country, the *Commercial* adds the following truthful and pertinent commentary: "There must be some cause for this, and in our opinion it may be found in the character and tendency of the so-called *literature* which enter into the reading of girls and young ladies. It is vitiating in its character, both to the mind and morals, and excites a morbid taste for the mock sentimental, undermines principle, and prepares many to become an easy prey to the wiles of the seducer. It is an insidious poison, and makes its approaches and develops its effects so gradually, as to be imperceptible until its work of ruin is accomplished. The country is flooded with such 'literature,' and those having charge of the young of either sex, cannot be too vigilant in guarding against its introduction into their houses; for it is one of the most effectual instruments in the hands of the enemies of purity, in accomplishing their purposes."

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### A MOST DANGEROUS ERROR.

It has been well said by J. A. James, that "It is a very common, but certainly a very great error, to consider religion somewhat in the light of necessary evil; a something to be endured, but not to be enjoyed; which is to be regarded with dread, rather than to be contemplated with desire; a scheme of penances, but not an act of choice, intended to conciliate an angry Deity rather than to please a God of love; in short, a gloomy obstruction to the joys of our social existence, which is to be avoided as long as possible, and then resorted to when those joys can be no longer experienced: and resorted to even then, merely as a propitiation for the sins of one world, and a means of delivering us from the torments of another.

Mistaken and shocking idea! How contrary not only to the word of God, which declares it, but also to the experience of those who have proved it, to be a peace that passeth understanding, a joy unspeakable and full of glory."

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## THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE SABBATH.

In the subjoined, the "*North British Review*" expresses the true doctrine: The Creator has given us a natural restorative—sleep; and moral restorative—Sabbath-keeping; and it is ruin to dispense with either. Under the pressure of high excitement, individuals have passed weeks together with little sleep, or none; but when the process is long continued, the over-driven powers rebel, and fever, delirium and death, come on; nor can the natural amount be systematically curtailed, without corresponding mischief. The Sabbath does not arrive like sleep. The day of rest does not steal over us like the hour of slumber. It does not entrance us almost, whether we will or not; but addressing us as intelligent beings, our Creator assures us that we need it, and bids us notice its return, and court its renovation. And if, going in the face of the Creator's kindness we force ourselves to work all days alike, it is not long till we pay the forfeit. The mental worker,—the man of business, or the man of letters—finds his ideas coming turpid and slow; the equipoise of his faculties is upset; grows moody, fitful, and capricious; and with his mental elasticity broken, should any disaster, occur he subsides into habitual melancholy, or in self-destruction speeds his guilty exit from a gloomy world. And the manual worker, the artizan, the engineer, toiling on from day to day and week to week, the bright intuition of his eye gets blunted, and forgetful of their cunning, his fingers no longer perform their feats of twinkling agility, nor by a

plastic and tuneful touch, mould dead matter or wield mechanic power; but, mingling his life's blood in his daily drudgery, his locks are prematurely gray, his genial humor sours, and slaving it till he has become a morose, reckless man, for any extra effort, or any blink of balmy feeling, he must stand indebted to opium or alcohol.

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### SPECIAL PROVIDENCE.

On this subject we adopt the following, from "*The land we live in*," by Rev. H. Eaton:

To a pious and truly enlightened mind, the laws of nature are but the uniform operation of divine power. Nothing but the agency of a personal, wise, and ever-present Creator, can answer the demands of his reason, or the desires of his heart. Such were the convictions of the ancient saints. Common instrumentality did not obscure the divine agency. To them God was present and active in every field of nature. God clothed the grass, arrayed the lilies, fed the ravens, gave goodly wings to the peacock, gave the horse strength, and clothed his neck with thunder.

In the frigid language of human science, the rainbow is produced by the refraction of the rays of the sun in passing through the drops of rain. But God says, "I set my bow in the cloud." Human instruction informs us that electricity, in passing from one cloud to another, causes a partial vacuum, and consequent vibrations in the air. These reach the tympanum of the ear, and thus thunder is produced. Not so the pious David; he exclaims, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name." "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The God of glory thundereth. God thundereth marvelously with his voice." Mere science asserts that water evaporates, ascends into the

atmosphere, collects and falls in rain upon the earth. But the ancient seer declares that "God covereth the heavens with clouds, and watereth the hills from his chambers. He sendeth the springs into the valleys that run among the hills. Thou visitest the earth and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers, thou blessest the spring thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and all thy paths drop fatness."

Accustom yourselves, my brethren, to recognize the hand of God in all the agencies of nature and art, where he is ever working for the happiness and elevation of man, facilitating travel, business and intelligence. Then you will never be alone; you will walk with God, and his presence and society will give energy to your character, decision to your principle, benevolence to your life, and gratitude to your affections.

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## ON THE SALVATION OF THE HEATHEN.

On this subject some have employed the pen and the tongue in such a way as to lead some to a feeling of opposition, and others to a feeling of indifference towards Christianity; but this result need not be feared from a scriptural investigation.

The great body of the Jews, from the earliest ages, denied salvation to the heathen. But this is justified neither by the Old Testament nor the spirit of Christianity. Even Mahommed did not go to such a degree of exclusiveness. After the third century, especially after the age of Augustine, some began to deny the salvation of the heathen; still there were always some who judged more favorably. It is true, the Bible says that God will

punish the heathen on account of their sins; not, however, because they did not believe in Jesus Christ, if this was not their fault, but because they did not act agreeably to the knowledge which they possessed, and the law of nature with which they were acquainted. Rom. 1:21.

We cannot agree with those who now teach that there is no salvation beyond the circulation of the Bible; and, therefore, hold up as the most prominent motive to missionary effort, that all who have not the Christian revelation will certainly sink into the endless torments of hell. The leading motive to evangelize the heathen, in our view, arises out of the love of God in the gift of his Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and our accountability to him. The gospel is a trust as well as a benefit committed to those who have it, and it is their bounden duty to give it to all who have it not. To hold it back from them, is disobedience to God. If this be true, it must follow that if the heathen cannot be saved because they have not the Bible, neither can those who have it; since it is their fault, entirely owing to their neglect, that the heathen have not the scriptures. Strange logic indeed, for such as have the Christian revelation, to draw the conclusion from their own sheer neglect to do what is obligatory on them to perform, that a sovereign God in his mysterious providence, has utterly cut off the whole heathen world from the attainment of bliss in the world to come. All people who possess the Bible, are under the most awful responsibility to communicate it to those who need it. It is negligence, it is unrighteousness, to hold it back. It is by the gospel the nations of the earth are enabled to come out of the moral darkness, social wretchedness, political bondage and barbarism in which they are involved.

The Christian system has a universal aspect of good will towards the interests of all mankind. It is adapted and designed to be the means of saving all, and all men are invited and urged to use the means placed in their power. The plain language of the record is: "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world,



but that the world through him might be saved." John 3:17. But a revelation of this fact has not been given and sent universally to all. *WILL ANY BE SAVED who have not this revelation?*

This is the direct question under consideration. In our opinion, it is correctly answered in the affirmative. The opposite opinion is founded on wrong principles. It supposes that the atonement cannot save any persons, unless they are instructed in regard to it. In his providence God may and can do, nay, actually does good to a creature, while that creature is ignorant of the medium of doing it. Thousands are benefited under the administration of Providence, who never knew that it is the providence of God. Then, under the dispensation of his grace, may there not be a Cornelius among the heathen, and will not all such be accepted before God for the sake of a Saviour, of whom they have not heard? Here it may be said, "Faith cometh by *hearing*, and hearing by the word of God: it can only be where the gospel is." Very true. But faith is necessary to salvation only to those who have the gospel, and are capable of believing. We believe infants are saved for Christ's sake, though they do not know the medium of their salvation; and so we think might a heathen, who is virtuous according to the light that he has, wherever such can be found. When Peter was convinced that salvation was not restricted to the Jews, he "opened *his* mouth and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Acts 10:34, 35.

We learn from the parable of the talents, Mat. 25:14—30, that God requires of individuals the improvement of the talents committed to their trust; and holds no one accountable for more talents than he delivered to him. Then have we not reason to think, that the heathen who improved all that God has given them, will be accepted in the Mediator?

The provision of the atonement embraces the heathen nations, whether the good tidings are proclaimed to them

or not. It is as truly and properly made for them before the message of salvation is delivered to them, as afterward. If such is not the fact, then there must be an insurmountable bar in the way of missionary institutions. If Christ has not died for the heathen nation or tribe, before the missionary of the cross arrives among them; pray what message has he to deliver to them? If Christ had not died for them, before the missionary went to them, it is certain that he has not since; for if it was not a fact before he delivered a message to them, it can not be a fact since. His teaching or not teaching them, cannot alter what was a fact before he or they had any being. All missionary operations take for granted that Christ has died for the heathen, who have never heard of his death. If Christ has not died for them, have missionary societies any message to send to them? When a missionary goes among a heathen nation, he tells them, "Christ died for you." If Christ died for the heathen without their knowing it; if he died for our race without their knowing it, except the few spectators who beheld the scene—and if he died for our lost race after millions had passed into the eternal world—before millions had come into being. Is it impossible for heathen to be saved, without their knowing the medium through which they are saved, until they enter on the endless happiness of the celestial world? We think not. We discern nothing in the analogy of nature, the laws of providence, or the fundamental principles of Divine Revelation, forbidding the idea. But we discover much that sustains it.

We do not undertake to say what means for obtaining salvation God may give those who are ignorant of Christianity. He is not straitened for resources to accomplish his august scheme of benevolence. From what is revealed in his word, it is undeniable that those who have opportunity and capacity to become acquainted with Christianity, cannot remain ignorant and unconvinced of its truth, and disobedient to the gospel, without contracting guilt of a scarlet hue; while those having neither opportunity nor capacity, may remain ignorant and uncon-

vinced of its truth, through intentional mistake and without criminality on their part. In my view, the holy scriptures never regard the heathen, merely as such, as excluded from salvation.

I am aware that Mark 16: 16, John 3: 18, also 3: 36, and like passages, may be offered to prove the contrary. But such passages do not relate to heathen who are innocently ignorant of the gospel. The word relied on as expressing the proof in the case, does not signify not to believe, but to *misbelieve*; and always implies guilt. The conclusion sometimes drawn from these passages, is as erroneous as it could be to conclude from 2 Thes. 3: 10, that the child and infirm man should be left to perish by hunger. One has well observed, "No one will ever be condemned for guiltless ignorance, or for unintentional and innocent mistake, but only for the guilty rejection and contempt of truth, or for living contrary to the truth when once known." "This is done in two ways: by despising and rejecting Christianity when it is once made known, or when opportunity is given for understanding and examining it. Rom. 3: 3; 2 Cor. 4: 11. By living in opposition to Christian truth when it is understood and embraced, and by neglecting its precepts. Vide Tit. 1: 16. In both these cases there is *guilt*, and hence punishment ensues. The word *unbelief*, therefore, often designates at the same time, these two kinds of guilt—e. g. Mark 16: 16, John 3: 18—21; 12: 47, 48.

Those heathen, now, who do not belong to the one or the other of these classes, are not *disbelievers*, though they may *not believe* in Christ. Upon such, therefore, condemnation is not pronounced in these passages. They are not indeed *obedient* to Christ, nor yet *disobedient*. Thus one who is not the subject of a certain king, may not indeed be obedient to his laws, either because he is ignorant of them or not bound in duty to obey them; but he cannot, on this account, be called *disobedient*. Disobedience always presupposes an obligation to obedience.

God has not seen good, as yet, to bring all nations to the knowledge of Christianity. And, little capable as

we are of understanding the plan of God in this respect, we ought not to conclude from this circumstance that the Christian revelation is unnecessary, and may easily be dispensed with. It has pleased God to leave many nations for thousands of years in a barbarous and savage state; but can we conclude from this fact, that intellectual cultivation and moral improvement are superfluous and useless, and therefore missions are unnecessary? Nor, on the other hand, can we conclude from this circumstance that God cannot save the heathen, because they have not enjoyed the light of Christian revelation? Human happiness has as many degrees and graduations as human cultivation and refinement of manners, and all men are not capable of one and the same degree. They cannot all, therefore, be treated by God in the same manner. One thing may be indispensable to the happiness of some persons and of some nations, while to others the same thing is quite superfluous, because they are as yet incapable of enjoying the happiness arising from it. It is not said in direct words in the New Testament, *that God will make the heathen eternally happy*. If this were said, there are many who would pervert it. But it is expressly asserted, that God does not demand more from any one than he is able, with his knowledge and abilities, to perform. Luke 12: 48, seq. And, also, that he who faithfully serves God according to the knowledge and means which he enjoys, and does what he considers to be his duty, is acceptable to him. Acts 10: 35. According to the testimony of Holy Scriptures, God will have reference, in determining the character and conditions of men, to the knowledge they have had, the dispositions they have cherished, and the actions they have performed. We may confidently expect from the goodness of God that, since he has heretofore given to so many nations only the light of nature, he will not make them miserable for the want of that higher knowledge of which they are innocently destitute. And since there is a future life, we may trust that he will there lead them to that higher degree of happiness and clearness of knowledge which they

did not attain in this life; because, without fault of their own, they were incapable of receiving it. To such a dispensation in the future world, there is at least an allusion in *Rev. 22: 2, in the tree of life, by the river of life, whose leaves serve* for the healing of the nations.

The heathen are in possession of a common rule, or standard of judging; or, in other words, a law is actually among them. *Rom. 2: 14, 15.* So true is it in its application to the heathen, that there is a light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world. None are so blind and so destitute of all capacity for discerning between the good and the evil, as to render them unfit subjects of a moral sentence. The day is approaching when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the gospel. *Rom. 2: 16.* With every one who shall receive the sentence of death on that day, will it be seen that there was either a light which he actually had and liked not to retain, or a light which he might have had and liked not to recover. We are as morally and rightfully to blame for not acquiring the light which we might receive, if we had so willed it, as for not preserving the light which we might attain if we had so willed it. One may be darkling within the limits of heathenism, or standing on the verge of Atheism, and yet his unrighteousness have the very same element with the unrighteousness of him before the eye of whose conviction God stands fully manifested, and who places himself in known defiance to his understood and authoritative voice. And so, on the other hand, one may be in the blindness of heathenism without the Christian revelation and yet wishing to see the light, his virtue and piety have the very same element with the virtue and piety of him who holds the Bible in his hand and is able to read it in his own tongue, and endeavors to obey from the heart the truth therein revealed.

In his seventh lecture on the epistle to the Romans, the learned Dr. Chalmers says:—"You can readily enough perceive, how, both with Jews and Christians, there are materials enough for such an examination, as renders them

fit subjects both of a reckoning and of a sentence on the great day of account. But this is not so immediately seen in regard to rude and uninformed paganism. To be without the pale of a written revelation, is held by many, as tantamount to being without the pale of all moral and judicial cognizance. And yet, we have many intimations, that the heathen will also be brought to the bar of the general judgment—that though perhaps more gently dealt with, yet they will be dealt with as responsible subjects of God's moral administration—that there is a principle of judgment which reaches even unto them, and upon which it will be a righteous thing for God to pass upon them a condemnatory sentence. Sodom and Gomorrah, we are informed, being to be sited before the tribunal of that day; and a punishment awarded them, which will only be more tolerable than the vengeance that awaits those, who have sinned in the face of clearer light, and better opportunities. Insomuch, that we know not of any age, however far back it may be removed in the darkness of antiquity; nor do we know of any wandering tribe, however secluded from all communications of light and knowledge with the rest of the species—the men of which will not be called before the great tribunal of humanity, and there, on the review of their doings in this world, will have such a place and such a portion assigned to them in the next, as shall be in fullest harmony with the saying that all the ways of God are in truth and in righteousness.

It were repeating over here what we have already more than once and on various occasions endeavored to argument, did we again enter upon the question, how this can be? The heathen will not be judged by the written law of Judaism, neither will they be judged out the things that are written in the scriptures of Christianity. God will not, in their case, charge them with the guilt of a sin for that which they were not taught and could not know to be sinful. It is not their helpless ignotance, and it is not the fatality of their birth, and it is not the thick moral envelope that has settled itself over the face of

their country, that will condemn them. It will be their sin, and that coupled with the circumstances of their knowing it to be sin, which will condemn them. And we have already remarked in one lecture, that there do exist, even in the remotest parts of Paganism, such vestiges of light as, when collected together, form a code or directory of moral conduct—that there are still to be found among them the fragments of a law, which they never followed but with an approving conscience, and never violated but with the check of an opposing remonstrance, that by their own wilfulness and their own obstinacy is overborne—in other words, that they are a law unto themselves, and that their own conscience vests it with an authority, by bearing witness to the rightness and obligation of its requirements—so that among the secret things which will be brought to light in the great day of revelation, will it be seen that all the sin for which a heathen shall be made to suffer, was sin committed in the face of an inward monitor, which warned him through time and will condemn him at his outset upon eternity.

In another lecture we observed, that what brought the conscience of Paganism out from its hiding place, was the undeniable fact of the charges and the recriminations and the defences, of which the most unenlightened Pagans were capable in their controversies with each other. This capacity of accusing and of excusing, proved a sense and a standard of morality to be amongst them. With the feeling of provocation after injury, was there mixed the judgment of a difference between the right and the wrong; and even in the rude outcry of savage resentment and the fierce onset of savage warfare, may we detect their perception of what is honest and what is unfair in the dealings of man with man. And just grant of any individual amongst them, that he is keenly alive to the injustice of others to himself, while, under the hurrying instigations of selfishness and passion, he works the very same injustice against them, and you make that individual a moral and an accountable being. We grant him to be sensible of what he ought to do, and thus make



him the rightful subject of condemnation if he does not. "For thinkest thou, O! man, that judgest them who do these things, and doest them thyself, that thou wilt escape the judgment of God?" Even we, therefore, unknowing as we are of the inward machinery of another's heart, can trace as it were an avenue by which the most unlettered barbarian might be approached in the way of judgment and retribution. And much more may we be sure that God, who judgeth all things, will find a clear and open path to the fulfillment of the process that is here laid before us—summoning all to their account, without exception; and, from the farthest limits of the human territory, calling heathens to his jurisdiction as well as Christians and Jews, and, under a law appropriate to each, dealing out the distributions of equity among the various families and denominations of the world."

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## SYNOPSIS OF BIBLE DOCTRINES IN THEIR ORDER.

BY REV. ROBT. DONNELL,

*Late Pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in  
Lebanon, Tennessee.*

1. All religion supposes the worship of a God. The God of the Bible describes himself a Spirit; infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. Three classes of perfections are ascribed to him. 1st. Moral, which conveys to us the idea of law or rule. 2d. Perfection, which conveys to us the idea of agency; wisdom to plan and power to execute, constitutes an agent: an agent must have a rule or law by which to act: holiness is the rule of his agency: his willing or decreeing a thing does not



make it right, but he wills or decrees because it is right. The 3d and last class of perfections ascribed to God, expresses the degree (if we may apply the term to Deity) in which he possesses the rule and power of action. He is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his rule and power of action.

2. The immutable perfections of his nature, which may be considered the law of his mind and source of motive to his will, viz: holiness, justice, goodness and truth, constitute the great principles of law to all intelligent beings. The law is immutable and universal. These grand principles cannot be brought down or modified to suit the weakness or wickedness of fallen creatures. The offended may be brought up to the standard at the pleasure of God, but if brought up at his pleasure, his plan must and will sustain every principle of the government and develope the law by which he, as a sovereign, purposes and acts. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? The Lord our God is holy, is essentially so, and declaratively so; he is holy in all his works and righteous in all his ways.

3. Man was made upright, created in the image of God, natural and moral. By the natural, we understand he was an agent; by the moral, the nature of those immutable principles, was printed in his mind. It was his duty to love God, and he was disposed to do it, but he was not confirmed in that holy and happy state; his not being created confirmed, does not prove that he cannot be confirmed in happiness or misery, but according to the immutable principles of law, his agency must be regarded, which would not have been, had he been created confirmed. His agency must be tested, and in a duration of time, according to the part he acts while on trial, heaven or hell may be his eternal destiny, and the immutable principles of law fully carried out. Man's agency was tested by a positive institution securing all the principles of a moral government. Man, the first man, the natural and legal head of all his race, eat the forbidden fruit; and by one man, this first man, sin

entered into the world and death by sin, and so death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.

4. The gospel is a positive institution which does not change one principle of the moral law, modify or bring it down to the weakness and wickedness of man, but provides to bring fallen man up to its righteousness and holy nature, and may be considered the administration of the law in a way of mercy, through a Mediator. The gospel is good news, a bundle of good news, containing the following important articles: First in order, election unconditional; an election of the race or whole family of Adam. We said election of the race to a state of probation, unthought of and unsolicited by him, and without any condition required, whether he would accept or reject. He was graciously, and sovereignly, and freely chosen to this state, without any condition on his part. The only condition, if it may be so called, was the death of Christ; if he died for the sins of the first Adam, he and his race shall have a personal being under an economy of mercy. What the Bible calls personal election, turns on sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, and that is an election to a state of glory. But as I must close this article, I will do it without comment on the other points of the system. We have seen election of the race is first in order: second, the atonement: third, the operation of the Holy Spirit: fourth, conviction for sin: fifth, repentance: sixth, faith in Christ: seventh, justification: eighth, adoption: ninth, regeneration: tenth, sanctification: eleventh, glorification.

O! the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable his judgments, and his ways past finding out. Had he not chosen and revealed the plan of salvation, the world never would have known it. Let us esteem that revelation, which not only tells of the past and present, but of things to come.



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